DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 170 717 CS 004 829

AUTHOR Dilena, Mike
TITLE Meaning-Emphasis Methods in Teaching Reading.
PUB DATE May 77
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of Remedial Teachers of Queensland (Mount Coutha Teachers Centre, May 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; *Language Experience Approach; *Literature Appreciation; *Reading Comprehension; *Reading Instruction; *Silent Reading; Teaching Techniques

ABSTRACT

Teachers can encourage students to see reading as meaning-making in a number of ways. Context support methods begin by ensuring that the context is already familiar to students so that word recognition is made easier. Language experience approaches encourage children to learn to read by first reading what they have produced. Real books, as distinguished from those typed from the children's own language and those created to make reading easy by taking children through simple consonant-vowel-consonant words, can help beginning readers know that reading is for information and delight. Teachers can assist older readers by asking them to read aloud, skipping words they do not recognize; by having them read along silently while someone else reads aloud; or by having them read for a specific purpose. Useful techniques in helping students learn to read include uninterrupted silent reading, having older students read children's literature as a preparation for parenthood, helping students expect that written language will make sense, and using group prediction and group cloze procedures. (TJ)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED170717

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

MEANING-EMPHASIS METHODS IN TEACHING READING*

Mike Dilena

Adelaide College of Advanced Education

SYNOPSIS

My previous paper in this volume argued that children should be encouraged to see reading as meaning-making. This paper outlines ways in which classroom teachers may work towards that end.

CONTEXT SUPPORT METHODS

An emphasis on reading for meaning is possible right from the beginning of reading instruction. To achieve such an emphasis it may be necessary to use what Morris (1971) calls "context support" methods. Such methods try to ensure that the MESSAGE of the text is already alive, in some form, in the mind of the reader. Insofar as the reader identifies individual words, he does so within a context that he has already been given. Morris suggests that we should begin with the fullest possible provision of support from the context and then seek gradually but deliberately to diminish the amount of that support. At first the teacher should ensure that everything is in the mind of the reader before it is encountered in print. Progress is made by gradually removing this support. As more and more words, phrases and even sentences come to be recognized in their supporting context, the children find themselves able to cope with even less context support.

Such a pattern of gradually diminishing reliance on context support was observed by Clay (1969). She reports that young children, not forced to prematurely concentrate on words, tend to go through a number of stages. With stories that have been read to them many times, they, at first, learn to match a page with part of the memorized story. Gradually they learn to match lines

---

* Paper presented at the Annual Conference of Remedial Teachers of Queensland, Mount Coutha Teachers Centre, May 1977.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Mike Dilena

CS 004 829

of print with relevant parts of the story and then to match some words within lines they have remembered. Ultimately they become aware of the match between words in the story and words on the page.

Pre-reading behaviour of this kind can be encouraged in beginning readers of any age. The value is that understanding of larger units - the structure of the story, details of events, relationships between characters, familiar sentence structures and memorized dialogue enables them to better identify words that would be unrecognized in isolation. Simply stated, context support makes word recognition easy.

LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE

The most widely used of context-support methods is the language experience approach. In this approach children learn to read by dictating what they want to say to the teacher and then reading back what she has written for them. They know what to expect because they have provided the content and the language in which it is expressed. The simplest form of the language experience approach is to have children dictate captions for the teacher to write beneath their paintings or their models. These are the first words that they learn to read. An alternative is to have children 'make' their own sentences by means of their own writing or through the "sentence maker" cards in the "Breakthrough to Literacy" scheme.

Even from the beginning of reading instruction children can make their own language experience books which can become their 'readers'. A typical example is the "excursion book" in which children stick polaroid photographs taken on a class excursion. Photographs are accompanied by captions such as "We went to Port Adelaide on a big yellow bus" and "We had lunch in a park with lots of trees". Children can also make "theme books" based on photographs of themselves. "Sad books" comprise photographs of children trying to look sad. They are accompanied by captions such as "Mervyn is sad because his father won't buy him some batteries for his transistor". Besides "Happy books" and "Angry books" there can be "Me books" comprising photographs of individual children with written details about their age, birthday, address, etc. Children can also write and illustrate "I can" books and "I like" ... books. "My family" books

are also popular.

Since some of us have been disturbed by the gap between the fragmented language of captions and the continuous, structured language of stories we have been working on getting children to dictate stories rather than captions. One method is to have small groups of children dictate a "retelling" of a story after the teacher has read it to them and discussed it with them. Another method is to use a series of sequential pictures as a stimulus for the children making up a story in small groups. Sequences of four large pictures have been prepared for the teaching of migrant children. Used as the basis for writing stories, they provide the teacher with an opportunity to elicit ideas which can be subtly transformed into forms of English which some migrant children are hazy about. The writing down and reading back of sentences is an excellent way of making them aware of differences between certain forms. For instance, recently, Roberto, a beginning reader in third grade, read back the word "suddenly", which the group had dictated, as "summer day".

Stories written from such picture sequences can be written up in books accompanied by smaller photocopies of the pictures. These become the books that children read to their teachers and parents. The enormous motivational value of such language experience methods becomes apparent when one sees how proudly and fluently children who have previously stumbled through print read their own stories.

EASY ENTRY TO 'REAL' BOOKS

'Real' books, however, are not beyond even the beginning reader. (I use the term 'real' not only to distinguish printed books from those typed from the children's own language. I use it also to separate books written especially for the delight of children and adults from the meaningless concoctions that are used in reading schemes which are supposed to make beginning reading easy by taking children through language composed only of simple consonant-vowel consonant words). Even pre-readers can 'read' books in the sense that they can relate the story that they know off by heart to the page, sentence or words before them. First grade children can go even further for there is an abundance

of simply written beautifully illustrated children's books that can easily be learned by heart. By going through such a process children obtain success easily by reading whole, meaningful stories. They learn what reading is for. They learn that books can afford information and delight. In doing this, they also become aware of the multiplicity of cues to word identification which are available to sophisticated readers.

Some reading schemes attempt to make reading easy not by simplifying the language to the extent that it lacks cohesion and sense but by providing children with language to read that is highly predictable and fun to read. For instance the "Sounds of Language" series developed by Bill Martin Jr. and Peggy Brogan makes abundant use of what children already know by including popular songs, folk chants, nursery rhymes etc., for the children to read. The effect of encountering such well-known material was illustrated for us recently by a little Greek third grader who was stumbling through a "Breakthrough to Literacy" book about a birthday party. She read the last page with amazing fluency and accuracy for it comprised the birthday song "Happy Birthday to you".

Books that are initially unfamiliar can be read aloud to children, in many cases over and over again. The demands on the teacher's time can be overcome by having simple books recorded on cassettes so that children can read along with the tape. Recently, we found that Longman's "Monster" series delighted a group of children who had passed through two or three years of schooling without learning to read. The value of these books is that, unlike so many other simple books, they have coherent, memorable stories rather than language fragments that have no continuity.

CHANGING STRATEGIES

For older, failing readers, Spitzer (1975) reads aloud short stories and then writes down their summaries of the stories. She encourages the students to read back the summaries without "blocking" i.e., without stopping at any unfamiliar word. The reader is encouraged to read only what he can and to skip over what he is unsure about.

This same emphasis on avoiding word analysis which tends to prevent the failing reader from using subsequent context is apparent in the technique which encourages the reader to say "blank" or "something" whenever he fails to identify a word. By hurrying on, he usually is able to make a better guess at what the word might be.

The same principle underlies the technique of "read along" which sometimes is called "neurological impress". We have found this most successful in a cross-age tutoring situation where older students read along with younger ones. The youngerstudent follows with his finger and says as many words as he can while the older student reads at a pace faster than the younger would normally manage. The aim is to draw the less able reader out of word-by-word reading and give him a wider context from which to make meaning.

For students who have developed confidence in reading simple texts, we encourage silent reading as early as possible. This is not an attempt to suppress vocalization but to take the pressure off oral performance. The aim is to encourage the children to read for whatever meaning they want to get from the book and to encourage reading for the fun of it.

Children for whom 'reading' is reading aloud to the teacher, will often be reluctant to read for themselves unless the teacher first gives them a task. We find it enough to say, "Go off and read this by yourself and then come back and tell me what happened". The questions can be more specific or the teacher can ask children to read two or three books to find out which ones they like best.

LEARNING TO READ BY READING

One of the principles that we adhere to is that children learn to read by reading and the more reading of 'real' books (as opposed to reading exercises in kits etc.) they can do, the better they will be able to read. For this reason we advocate what is sometimes known as U.S.S.R. (Uninterrupted, Silent, Sustained Reading). The whole class spends part of each day reading silently books of their own choice. At first five minutes may be enough but, depending upon the age of the class, this may be gradually extended to 30 minutes or more.

We have found that one way of motivating reluctant older readers to read a lot is to have them study 'children's literature' as preparation for parenthood or as part of a "working with little kids" programme. We have older students read dozens of library books suitable for much younger children. The job of the older children is to choose books that the younger children will enjoy. The older children can read to the younger ones and discuss the stories with them. While the older students are working with the younger ones, they can also help out the teacher by writing down younger children's dictated stories. In this way they become very conscious of their own spelling.

Part of the business of getting children to read for meaning is to get them to expect that written language will make sense to them. Having them read real books for pleasure and for information is probably the surest way to encourage reading for meaning, but there are activities which concentrate directly on reading for meaning.

We have had a good deal of success with what Walker (1974) calls group prediction.

In group prediction the teacher provides her students with the title or first paragraph of a short story which withholds important information until the end. The class discusses the paragraph and tries to decide what will happen, where the story is set, when the action takes place etc. The teacher encourages students to justify their hypotheses by reference to the paragraph. Once a number of hypotheses have been recorded, the teacher presents the second paragraph. Students are encouraged to modify or abandon earlier hypotheses in the light of new information. Gradually, as each paragraph is presented, students are able to argue about different hypotheses and evaluate them in terms of what the writer actually says.

Walker (1974) also describes what he calls "group cloze". Children are presented with passages from which key words have been deleted. The first paragraph is usually left intact but after that about one word in every five or ten (depending on the difficulty of the passage and the ability of the children)

is deleted. We normally include a few blanks where the exact word is highly predictable but we also delete words which could just as well be replaced by other words. Students work well in pairs or small groups. Each pair or group reports to the class and has to justify the word or words chosen. Discussions always centre on which word would be appropriate in the context given and so students are forced to come to terms with the sense of the whole passage.

The same kind of close attention to what is actually meant by the writer can be obtained by working through S.R.A's 'Reading for Understanding' kit in a way that the publishers never intended. We encourage children to work through the cards until they get an answer that does not fit the answer in the answer key. They work in groups and try to find out why their answer isn't the right one. Frequently they find that they were guessing on inadequate evidence. Often they are puzzled by word meanings - both in the passage and the multiple choices. The best discussion occurs when students are convinced that the answer that the kit gives is 'wrong'. If often seems that they have a case, for some of the passages appear ambiguous and able to be interpreted in at least two ways.

A final strategy that we have found successful, particularly with upper primary and secondary students, is the process that we call 'boiling down' prose. In the context of finding answers to key questions posed as part of project work, students read through quite difficult prose material in text books and library reference material. Their job is to work through it to find information relevant to their project and to report this information in written reports that the rest of the class will be able to read and understand. These are not projects for teacher and parent approval but for the gathering and presentation of information for the class. It means that students have to make sense of what they read. Other students and the teacher are available to help with difficult concepts and further information. We are frequently amazed at how students are able to make sense of conceptually and linguistically difficult material and present it in clear simple prose that says all that needs to be said.

Almost every level of reading that we deal with convinces us that reading is

best taught and developed by having readers positively interact with meaningful texts. This is not to deny that attention to sub-goals, such as learning the relations between sounds and graphic patterns, has a place in learning to read. Our view is simply that comprehension is both the means and the end of reading.

***

BIBLIOGRAPHY

CLAY, Marie M. "Reading Errors and Self-Correction Behaviour". British Journal of Educational Psychology Vol. 39, 47-56, 1969

MORRIS, Ronald "What children learn in learning to read". English in Education Vol. 5 No. 2, 1971.

WALKER, Christopher "Reading Development and extension", London, Ward Lock Educational 1974.

SPITZER, Rosina "Taking the Pressure Off". Journal of Reading Dec. 1975/